DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 323 FL 017 299

AUTHOR Hashmi, Mahmud S.
TITLE Marketing in the Islamic Context.
PUB DATE May 87
NOTE 19p.; In: Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions. Conference Proceedings; see FL 017 281.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Standards; Business Administration Education; Business Communication; Cultural Traits; *Intercultural Communication; *International Trade; *Islamic Culture; *Marketing; Moral Values; *Social Values

ABSTRACT

The implications of the Islamic religion and culture for marketing strategies and practices are discussed. An introductory section describes the Islamic population and its segments, and gives some historical background about the religion. A list of the principal tenets and practices of the Islamic faith, and the specific marketing implications of each, follows. These include: shahada (the profession of faith), salat (worship), saum (fasting), zakat-alms (giving), haj (pilgrimage to Mecca), riba (usury), family obligations, the supremacy of life and environmentalism, and mannerisms and food. It is concluded that Islamic religion is both private and public and permeates the whole fabric of the society, creating characteristics and habits in the market that successful marketing must accommodate. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED293323

MARKETING IN THE ISLAMIC CONTEXT

Presented to the Sixth Annual Conference on Languages and Communication for World Business and the Professions.
May 8, 1987 Ann Arbor, Michigan

Mahmud S. Hashmi
Assistant Professor
Youngstown State University

FL017299

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

G. Voght

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

MARKETING IN THE ISLAMIC CONTEXT

Introduction

Doing business across national boundaries requires interaction with people, their institutions and organizations nurtured in different cultural environments. Values that are important to one group of people may mean little to another. Typical U.S. attitudes and perceptions of symbols, objects, artifacts, and forms of communication may be at variance with the attitudes and perceptions that other people have of these same things. More than any other function of a business, marketing is the most susceptible to cultural error, since marketing by definition requires contact with the people of the country concerned. To be successful in their relationships overseas, international marketers must be students of culture. They must not only obtain factual knowledge but also become culturally sensitive.

Although there are as many definitions of culture as there are anthropologists, most professionals view culture as being the sum total of beliefs, rituals, morality, institutions and artifacts that characterize human population. In other words, culture consists of learned pattern of behavior common to members of a given society - a unique life style of a particular group of people which is transmitted from one generation to another. One such group of people, with inherent commonalities in their traits, behavior and dispositions, are the followers of Islam. We must understand that Islam is not only a religion but a detailed way of life and muslims are not free to alter their tradition just because times have changed; "the messenger of God was the last of prophets, of whom Jesus was one, and the revelations he received were final and complete."

A major monotheistic religion; the population of the Islamic world is approaching one billion. As can be seen from Table 1, Islam is the dominant religion in at least thirty countries and is also the second largest religion of western Europe. Significant Islamic populations are found world wide including such places as India, 80 million; the Soviet Union, 46 million; and China, 15 million. The strength of Islam in many markets (see Table 1) is such as to be critical to the success of many products and communications. If the marketing practices are in harmony with Islamic principles, the harmony will enhance the market acceptance and use of the product in the Islamic world.

Table 1
Muslim Polities

Afghanistan	Gambia	Morocco	Syria
Algeria	Indonesia	Niger	Tunisia
Bangladesh	Iran	Oman	Turkey
Bahrain	Iraq	Pakistan	UAE
Brunei	Jordan	Qatar	Yemen (South)
Chad	Libya	Saudi Arabia	(North)
Djibouti	Malasyia	Somalia	
Egypt	Mauritania	Sudan	

Source: Britannica Book of the Year: World Data, Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1986; and Muslim Peoples: A World Ethnographic Survey, Greenwood Press, 1984.

The Islamic Religion

Some remarks about the Islamic religion may serve as background to the subject under discussion.

Islam was first pronounced through the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) in Mecca in 610 A.D. For the next twelve years, the prophet (p.b.u.h.) had to struggle against the polytheist inhabitants of that town who rejected his egalitarian teachings as vigorously as they did his monotheistic beliefs. He

had to flee Mecca for Medina in A.D. 622 (the start of the muslim era). In Medina, the first community of Islam, the Islamic city-state was established with the prophet (p.b.u.h.) himself as its temporal head. With the basic ideology of Islam well entrenched, legislative guidance developed, aiming at the best possible results in all spheres of life, including the social, economic and political domains. At the death of the prophet (p.b.u.h.) in 632, the Holy Book of Islam, the Quran, had been completely revealed. It incorporates the basic guidance of Islam and is believed to be God's own word. Preserved in the hearts of thousands of the prophet's (p.b.u.h.) disciples and also recorded in writing during his lifetime, the Ouran was duplicated for wide distribution. As a source of Islamic guidance, the Ouran was supplemented by the Sunna (way), the reported words and actions of the Prophet (p.b.u.h.), which run into tens of thousands of records, known as hadiths (traditions).

As the Islamic state expanded and incorporated most of the territories then known, muslim leadership was confronted with innumerable problems. As a result, the Islamic legal system emerged, known as Fiqh or Sharia, based primarily on the Quran and the hadith records. Muslim jurists sought to answer every conceivable question and organized their findings into several categories—dealing first with the details of the ritual duties and then with all types of human interactions, including what may be regarded as commercial law, personal law and criminal law. If an answer could not be found in the Quran or Sunna, resort was made to the principle of analogy. The consensus of the first generation of muslims on any matter was recognized as a fourth authority.

Islam is divided between Sunnis and Shiites. Their differences arose out of disagreement over the rightful succession to Muhammed's (p.b.u.h) authority, relatives or disciples. Shia muslims look back to Ali, son-in-law of the prophet (p.u.b.h.) and the first male muslim who should have been the first caliph. He, in fact, became the fourth, was rapidly murdered, and the caliphate passed into other hands. Ever since then, there has been ill feeling and occasional violence between the two groups. With stronger allegiance to religious leaders such as Khomeini of Iran, Shiites account for only about ten percent of all muslims and are the dominant group in only two countries, Iraq and Iran.

We must understand that Islamic guidance permeates all aspects of human life and all muslims, regardless of their particular persuasion or degree of adherence, share the dominant tenants of the faith. The following discussion coorelates specific Islamic beliefs with marketing implications.

TENANTS OF THE ISLAMIC FAITH

Shahada or Profession of Faith - Oneness of God

The profession of faith: There is no god but God, (and) Muhammed (peace be upon him) is the prophet of God, is made on all kinds of occasions - at birth, death, in times of peace and battle. There is no time in a muslim's life when this creed is far from his lips or his heart.

Marketing Implications

The Islamic world offers a huge market for standardized products acceptable in Islam. A company which serves one muslim country satisfactorily can build a strong brand and company loyalty throughout the Islamic world. Strong brand

loyalties will create opportunities for brand extension strategies, saving the manufacturer the high cost of promoting new names in the market. Attention should be paid to finding a good brand name. It should not be offensive, obscene or negative sounding. Easy to recognize and remember, it should be adaptable to packaging or labelling requirements and to any advertising medium. It should be pronounceable in all languages and be available for use. Standardized mass media techniques can be used with unity in advertising copy, layout and the central theme. Strict moral guidelines govern advertising. Alcohol and pork are forbidden in Islam, hence they cannot be advertised. In the case of pork, for example, this ban extends to images of pigs such as stuffed toys and piggy banks. Human nudity is forbidden in ads, as are pictures of anything sacred.

Salat or Worship

Islam has prescribed five periods of daily prayer-before sunrise, at noon, in midafternoon, in the evening and at night. The ritual prayers are in Arabic. (The Quran 20:130; 17:78-79)

A believer may say his prayers in public or private as long as he faces Mecca and the Kabah. (The Quran 2:144)

It is, however, thought desirable that he makes his way to a nearby mosque for prayers--if that is at all possible. Particularly important is the congregational prayer at noon on Fridays, where attendance is incumbent on all adult males.

The call to prayer-'Azan' is chanted in Arabic. The call always includes the

Shahada in a declaration such as this: "God is great, God is great. Come to prayer, come to prayer. Come to prosperity, Come to prosperity. God is great, God is great. There is no god but God." At dawn, the call also reminds muslims that prayer is better than sleep.

A call to prayers creates situations that may strike newcomers to the Islamic world as incongruous but they are taken for granted by the participants. In Cairo, the policeman who stands guard at the rear door of the Central Bank drops to the grimmy sidewalk to worship at the appointed hour, leaving the door unwatched. The place of prayer should be clean, so he uses a battered piece of cardboard as a mat over the pavement.

The Quran requires that the worshipper be clean in body as well as soul when praying. Ablution-'wadu' is prescribed. (The Quran 5:7)

Marketing Implications

Productivity targets might be revised downward because of the prayer breaks-affecting the scheduled delivery dates. On the weekdays, take into account the prayer timings when planning sales calls to prospects. Since Friday is not ordained as a day of rest, it is not a religious requirement that Friday be a work holiday and some privately owned retail outlets are kept open. However, the business activity comes to a stand still at the time of the Friday prayers. On Fridays, no official business transactions are conducted in most of the muslim countries as Friday is generally observed as the weekly official holiday.

The routes leading to the mosques should be used to develop outdoor media. It is a religious duty to be bodily clean and the use of scents was practiced by

the prophet (p.b.u.h). Hygiene-related 'halal' products offer a big market with muslims.

Saum or Fasting

There are twenty nine or thirty days of daylight fasting during the month of Ramadan, the month when the Ouran was laid down. Ramadan is the ninth month of the muslim calendar. The fast is esteemed as inculcating both self-control and sympathy with the poor and destitute. All muslims, in good health and not engaged on a journey, are required to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from dawn to sunset. Not fasting is regarded as an act of defiance of the communal moral code; it is an assertion of atheism. (The Quran 2:183-185, 187).

The muslim world celebrates the completion of the month of fasting with the Islamic Festival of Eid-ul-Fiter. On this day, in addition to five daily prayers, Eid prayers are offered in mid morning in a large communal ground, and it is a public holiday in all the muslim countries.

Marketing Implications

Fasting affects the pattern of life in the entire muslim countries. Public life, commerce and government slow to a crawl because the rigors of the fast result in curtailed work hours. Production targets and delivery dates are adversely affected. Business calls from overseas should be avoided in this month. To build good will send Eid greeting cards to the patrons and major prospects. Offer Eid greetings in the media-newspapers, commercial radios and wherever permitted on the television as a means of image building.

Zakat-Alms Giving

Both legal alms, 2.5 percent annually on income and saving, and free will gifts, sadaqats, are enjoined on muslims. Unlike modern taxation, zakat is a flat rate and does not rise exuberantly on an ascending scale. Thus it does not discourage working for greater gain, nor is it exposed to evasive or dishonest measures. Equity can be achieved by encouraging voluntary charities, Sadaqat, which assure seven hundredfold rewards with God. (The Quran 2:43, 110, 177, 227)

Marketing Implications

Corporate donations should be given for charity. Build hospitals, schools, orphanages. Provide grants/scholarships for education to students from poor families. Emphasize company's charitable acts through institutional advertising to build good will.

Haj - Pilgrimage to Mecca

Every adult muslim who can afford it is required to undertake a pilgrimage to the holy mosque in Mecca - the city where the revelations which, make up the Quran began. The shrine was constructed by apostles Abraham and his son Ismail. The pilgrimage occurs during the twelth month of the muslim lunar calender. Upon his return, the pilgrim, or the Haji as he is called, gains personal prestige in the home community. The major impact of the pilgrimage is the pilgrim's strengthened sense of international brotherhood and solidarity.

Eid-ul-Adha commemorates the sacrificial ritual performed by the apostle Abraham as commanded by God. In all Islamic countries millions of animals are

slaughtered and distributed to the needy. This festival also marks the culmination of the Haj ceremonies and is a public holiday. (The Quran 2:158, 196-203 and 3:97)

Marketing Implications

Financial assistance, grants and other charitable acts to the needy will foster a caring image of the company in the community. Before traveling to the Islamic world for a sales call, make sure that the prospect/contact/ customer is not away for pilgrimage. On behalf of the company, offer Haj greetings to all the patrons in the print media, commercial radios and on TV, to build good will with them and their home communities.

Riba or Usury

The idea underlying the prohibition of usury is that all believers are brothers and therefore should help one another financially as well as in other ways. Condemnation of usury is in keeping with the Islamic prohibition of earning without effort or risk and with the cooperative spirit it promotes. (The Quran 2:275; 3:130)

The result of forbidding usury is that a debtor cannot make his situation worse by postponing repayment: the debt cannot increase by the accumulation of interest, yet a debt is to be viewed as a serious matter. Acording to the Islamic law the debts of the deceased should be quickly settled by the mourners, preferably before his burial.

In present day muslim countries the situation regarding usury varies from place to place. There are no religious restrictions on the financial and

commercial institutions in Turkey, Indonesia and Malaysia. In Saudi Arabia the law specifically forbids the charging of interest. In Pakistan and Iran great efforts have been made to introduce Islamic banking. In compliance with the Quranic principle a bank, instead of charging interest takes a share in the equity of the project.

Marketing Implications

Payments in cash should be emphasized and the use of credit as a marketing tool should be avoided. Encourage price discounts for cash payments. Increase price concessions to regular customers. Raise prices for layaway options or on installments instead of conducting interest transactions. Justification for higher prices includes the increased inventory, security and handling costs.

Family Obligations

In the Islamic world an individual is responsible to the family for social behavior, and the family is responsible to the society for the behavior of the individual. The reputation of an individual man or woman reflects upon the family and about a third of the Quran is devoted to family matters and relationships. Marriage between two individuals represents union of two families and the extended family is as important as the family unit.

(A) Respect for elders/parents

In Islam there is a profound respect for knowledge and experience. Since these qualities are normally associated with age, respect for one's elders in the Islamic world is deeply ingrained. A sense of hierarchy is particularly strong in the family. A young person will automatically

rise to his feet when an older relative comes into the room. (The Quran 17:23-34)

(B) Relationships outside wedlocks

"And who guard their modesty-save from their wives that their right hands possess, for then they are not blameworthy." (The Quran 23:5-6)

(C) Men's modesty

"Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Lo! Allah is aware of what they do." (The Quran 24:30)

(D) Women's modesty and seclusion

"And tell the believing women to lower their gaze and be modest, and to display of their adornment apparent, and to draw their veils over their bossoms, and not to reveal their adornment save to their own husbands...". (The Quran 24:31)

The seclusion and veiling of women is a subject pepp ed with ambiguities and seclusion of women sometimes takes on an extreme form, especially in the Arabian Peninsula. Interpretations differ as to the meaning of "drawing their veils over their bosoms." In Saudi Arabia women cover their faces and heads. In Iran and increasingly in Pakistan women wear chador, an over garment, whereby the face is uncovered but the forehead and hair are not shown. Thus, various customes have been established and the present day situation varies from place to place.

Marketing Implications

Women and men shop with their husbands or wives, or in small groups of people

of the same sex. This would be a consideration in marketing, where, for instance, an image of peer approval might be more appropriate than one of self-indulgence. The importance of elders in the family as opinion leaders should not be under estimated. Because of the extended family system word of mouth communication and customer referrals are very critical.

Do not praise your host's wife, daughters or offer gifts to them in the Islamic world. The family dealings unlike business dealings fall under private domain.

Hiring men for conducting, face to face, interviews with women, or through phone calls, or mailing questionnaires addressed to women for collecting market research data are very inappropriate. Access to female consumers is often possible only through women working as selling agents who use such tools as, home demonstrations at women's social gatherings and women's specialty shops. Promote your products in the women's magazines for the literate audience but avoid human nudity in ads as that is regared highly offensive.

Supremacy of Human Life and Environmentalism

Compared to other forms of life, human life is of supreme importance. Nature is the sustenance of man and he has been commanded to make the best use of God's created resources without waste and destruction.

Muslims are allowed to slaughter animals for food, but have been prohibited from killing them for fun or sport. And when an animal is slaughtered, it should be done with the least possible degree of pain. The name of the Life Giver is besought before slaughter, as a reminder that life must not be taken

away thoughtlessly but for the purpose of good. (The Ouran 2:30; 5:5; 6:141, 165; 7:31; 45:12-13)

Marketing Implications

Do not give human names to animals, particularly to dogs. According to Islamic belief, food, vessels and clothes which have come in contact with dogs become impure. The sale of pet food in the Islamic world is less important.

At present no environmental movements exist in the Islamic world but industries should anticipate strict enforcement of environmental and anti-pollution regulations; requiring business to invest in ant-pollution devices, eliminating dangerous pollutants from the environment and introducing safe substitutes. Socially conscious companies will find an easy acceptance in the community.

Use floral designs, sceneries and artwork in advertising as representation of aesthetic values. In institutional advertising a company should focus on its attempts and achievements in improving the quality of the living environment. Advocacy advertising should be used to educate consumers to develop ways to reduce litter and the marring of the landscape.

Mannerism and Food

(A) Salam Alekum

"And you are greeted with a greeting, greet with a fairer than it, or return it; surely God keeps a watchful count on everything". (The Ouran 4:86)

Salam alekum (peace be on you) is the traditional Islamic greeting and

the reply is: Wa alekum Salam (and on you be peace). This greeting is universally used between strangers, friends and relations at all times of the day. According to the Quran Salam alekum is the greeting given to the blessed on entering paradise. Shaking hands is encouraged by tradition, and is founded upon the express example of the prophet (p.b.u.h) himself.

(B) Food

Eating the meat products of swine, wild animals with claws, all birds of prey, dead meat, reptiles, worms and that which has not had its throat cut whilst still alive (except fish) is forbidden. Muslims are also prohibited from touching all sorts of intoxicants. (The Quran 2:172-173, 219; 5:4-5,93-94)

Marketing Implications

The executives of the international firms, who are, outsiders to the Islamic community, should show sensitivity to the Islamic customs when visiting muslim countries. For instance, they should use the right hand for greeting and eating food. The use of the left hand for passing or accepting anything should be avoided. It is offensive to present the soles of one's feet toward a person in the company or sleeping with legs facing Mecca. Do not use Quranic quotations, prophet's (p.b.u.h.) name, God's names or pictures of Islamic shrines on packages.

At the death of an important customer/business contact company condolences should be sent to the bereaved family through the print media. A personal visit by the company representative to the bereaved family will be highly

appreciated. These gestures will have a profound effect on the company's image in the community and may accelerate a new product acceptance and consumption. On such visits it should be borne in mind that mourners sit on the ground to show respect to the deceased.

The Eid festivals in the Islamic world are public holidays and occasions of social gatherings and family reunions. They provide opportunities for the sale of new shoes, clothing, sweets and food items. Consumers should be served with Islam-oriented products such as non-alcoholic drinks 'halal' or kosher meat packages. Food products should use vegetable or beef shortening and the ingredients on packages should be clearly specified.

Commercial Transactions - Just Dealings.

Islam looks with favor upon commercial activity and has nothing to say against inequality in terms of wealth and possessions. The Islamic economic framework is delineated by the call to uphold the Islamic virtues of truth, honesty in dealings, respect for the rights of others, pursuit of moderation, sacrifice and hard work. These virtues should guide a muslim in his economic struggle through the processes of acquisition, production, distribution and consumption. In other words, the spiritual aspirations of the individual must harmonize with his material endeavors. Pledges, trusts, and terms concluded with other parties must be kept. Writing down the terms of agreements is strongly recommended. The contracting parties should be responsible and of sound mind; the commodity should be clearly specified, truly owned by the seller and accessible and deliverable; and the price also has to be made specific. The terms of the contract should convey the mutual accpetance by both parties and the wording of the written contract should be categorical and

unambiguous to avoid social tension or litigations. (The Quran 2:282; 5:10; 7:33; 17:35; 83:1-4)

Marketing Implications

Avoid exaggerated claims in advertising. A worker, manufacturer or an administrator should exert the utmost effort to make his product as perfect as possible. It is related that the prophet (p.b.u.h.) said:* "God likes to see any one of you, when you do something, to make it as perfect as you possibly can." This hadith implies the use of less formal product warranties as a marketing tool.

Writing down the contracts between the parties make the transfer of goods safe; they also ensure the absence of vagueness or misunderstanding--whether the transaction is a contract of sale, partnership, employment or anything else.

However, there is a very strong tradition for conducting business and concluding agreements on a verbal basis and such agreements are as binding as any other kind. Any attempt by one of the parties to modify an aspect of the agreement is viewed as dishonorable and unbusinesslike.

*Suyuti, al-Jami al-saghir Beirut, 1970, Vol. 2, P144 Hadith no. 1876.

Conclusion

The word for religion in the Quranic tongue is "din", a term which connotes a whole way of life. Islamic religion is not merely a private matter, nor does it touch only the periphery of individual lives; it is both private and public, and permeates the whole fabric of the society. Obviously, marketing strategy is a function of buyer characteristics. Such demands that the international marketers have to conform their marketing practices with the Islamic principles if they want to be effective in the Islamic world. The purpose of this article was to present a few of the possible marketing decisions that international marketers may make when considering the influence of Islamic culture.